



A REWARDING PATH TO GLOBAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT

By Lt. Cmdr. Arcelia Wicker, MSC, deputy director, Navy Medicine Office of Global Health Engagement



Recently, while flying over the Pacific to Papua New Guinea to help lay the groundwork for a global health engagement project, I reflected on my 18-year career in the Navy, starting as a steam engineer onboard a dock landing ship and then as a fire control officer shooting SM-1 missiles off the deck of a frigate.

When I became a Medical Service Corps (MSC) officer I had one vision in mind, to command a hospital of my own. I took on numerous general healthcare administrator positions. With each new job I gained more knowledge and experience to become the best I could possibly be.

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Driven to succeed, I volunteered to deploy overseas. I was ready to go when to my dismay my orders were canceled. However, a few days later I received a fortuitous phone call from Navy Medicine East's Plans, Operations and Medical Intelligence (POMI) informing me of another opportunity to excel, deploying aboard USNS Comfort. My reaction was thanks, but no thanks. I've had enough of that "ship stuff." I had vowed to never return.

But the POMI said the mission was different. It was a humanitarian effort, and I was urgently needed to fill a general health care administration position. Hesitatingly I accepted, having no idea that the five-month Continuing Promise mission would change my life's direction and put me on a drastically different path than the one I had envisioned.

While deployed, I was shown a whole different world. Until then, my days included relative value units, business plans, budget activity groups, and access to care. For those five months, I traded in my khakis for boots and NWUs, dipping my toe in the world of global health engagement (GHE) for the first time.

When I initially arrived aboard Comfort, I was unsure of what my role would be. There was already a director for administration and patient-admin team in place. What was I going to do for five months? I found out soon enough and was assigned to medical operations (MEDOPS) with the POMIs.

The first day onboard, I met the MEDOPS team and started asking questions: How many patients are we going to see? How are we going to report out? Are we going to trend and analyze the types of encounters we see in each country? Those lines of questions landed me the position of sole data analyst for the mission, which turned out to be very beneficial. By analyzing the data from each port visit, I was able to drive decision making that ultimately made the mission more productive, and was able to give host nations important data that could be used to improve access and outcomes among their residents.

Upon my return stateside, I began questioning my career path. I called the detailer to see if Comfort's director for administration billet was open, but no.

I then accepted orders to work for the U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine of Surgery (BUMED) chief of staff. Yep – more admin. I wondered if I could continue as a successful administrator after experiencing such a life-changing humanitarian mission. However, little did I know the administrative skills I used during Continuing Promise would be fruitful in other areas of GHE.

I've had the good fortune of being introduced to many areas of BUMED's framework. When I checked in, BUMED was reorganizing during that time, the Office of Global Health Engagement was established. I was introduced to the GHE team and thus invited myself to their meetings and collaborations, eventually becoming deputy director of Navy Medicine's Office of Global Health Engagement.

As I reflect on my journey thus far, and continue to forge new paths as a global health specialist, I ask myself every now and then, "How did I get here?" But I know the answer. I couldn't have gotten where I am today without the pioneers that recognized the need for GHE missions, the men and women both in and out of uniform, who inspired me to find a new direction in this exciting and impactful enterprise.